

Why Shooting Stars?

Spahic Omer

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent to enlighten and guide. The Qur'an sums up the task as bringing people out from darkneses into the light.

In other words, the Prophet came to teach people what life in its totality is and how to live it. Life is too short and too serious to be wasted or subjected to trial and error procedures.

Thus, some of the more repugnant adversaries of the Prophet were ignorance, superstition and blind following. He went to great lengths to fight them.

An example of this pattern is this.

According to a *hadith* (Sahih Muslim, Book 26, Hadith No. 5538), the Prophet was sitting once at night with some of his companions when suddenly a meteor shot (shooting star) gave a dazzling light. He asked what the people used to say in the pre-Islamic days when there was such a shot (of meteor).

The companions replied that they used to say that that very night either a great man had been born or a great man had died. However, the Prophet said that those meteors were shot neither at the death of anyone nor on the birth of anyone.

Rather, whenever Almighty Allah decides to issue a command, His words are transmitted from one group of angels to another throughout the seven heavens.

In this process of transmission, the jinn attempt to eavesdrop on what is going on. They snatch what they manage to overhear and carry it to their friends (non-believers, sorcerers, fortune-teller and astrologers).

And when the angels see the jinn doing so, they attack them with meteors.

The Prophet concluded: "If they (the jinn) narrate only which they manage to snatch that is correct, but they alloy it with lies and make additions to it."

This same process is mentioned in the Qur'an as well: "Indeed, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment of stars, and as protection against every rebellious devil, (so) they may not listen to the exalted assembly (of angels) and are pelted from every side. Repelled, and for them is a constant punishment. Except one who snatches (some words) by theft, but they are pursued by a burning flame, piercing (in brightness)" (al-Saffat, 6-10).

The word used for throwing meteors at the jinn is *rajm*. Generally, in Arabic *rajm* means "stoning" or "pelting someone or something with stones".

For example, cases of adultery committed by a married man or married woman are punishable by *rajm* (stoning).

Rajm also means “missile”, “projectile” and even “meteor”.

Hence, the main attribute of Satan is *al-rajim*, which is normally translated as “expelled” and “accursed”. However, the root of the word is *rajm* (stoned).

Believers persistently seek Allah’s protection against Satan who is *al-rajim* (both the “accursed” and “stoned one”).

That means that Satan is stoned and kept at bay in the heavens with meteors, before being “stoned” and held back on the earth by the devout deeds of believers.

Emblematically stoning Satan as a compulsory ritual of Hajj (pilgrimage), by throwing stones at three pillars representing Satan, symbolizes this dreadful fate of his.

Indeed, there is neither peace nor asylum for Satan and his followers from the presence and constant involvement of Almighty Allah and His soldiers in the heavens and on the earth.

The Qur’an says: “And to Allah belong the soldiers (forces) of the heavens and the earth. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise” (al-Fath, 7).

“As to those who turn (for friendship) to Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers - it is the fellowship (party) of Allah that must certainly triumph” (al-Ma’idah, 56).

These are the possible takes on the mentioned *hadith*.

First

The Prophet encouraged people to be curious, inquisitive and to ask. He did so in order that they could increase their knowledge and, in turn, enhance their guidance.

If there were sincere questions, there were also sincere answers in the offing. A person who thinks he knows enough will not progress. He will not conquer, but will be conquered.

“So ask the people of the message if you do not know” (al-Nahl, 43).

“The man who asks a question is a fool for a minute, the man who does not ask is a fool for life” (Confucius).

Second

People should be open-minded and critical in their pursuit of knowledge. They should reject blind following.

Superstitions, myths, legends and even half-truths should not be entertained. People should be free and motivated, and should not recognize any imposed or artificial boundaries.

The only thing that should inspire and guide them is the infinite truth premised on the revelation and reason. Their only goal should be to find, embrace and serve that truth.

Third

Asking questions, investigating, (re)searching, disputing and doubting are critical concepts. They should be clearly defined and their scopes, as well as roles, clearly established against the backdrop of true knowledge and wisdom.

In no way should mere guessing, conjectures and scepticism be accommodated. They are all antitheses of knowledge – and the truth.

Agnosticism is a bane of existence and can bring about only hopelessness and depression.

Therefore, an appropriate ethics for knowledge seeking and knowledge application is paramount.

A hint at it is given in Allah's directive to "read and proclaim", but "in the name of your Lord who created" (al-'Alaq, 1).

Such a form of knowledge acquisition is expected to lead its executors to the utmost levels of humility and appreciation.

That is one of the reasons why the Qur'anic *surah* (chapter) *al-'Alaq*, which begins with the imperative "read!", ends with three other imperatives: do not obey him (the non-believer and his non-belief), bow down in adoration, and draw near to Allah.

This arrangement is by no means coincidental. It indicates the beginning and nature of the knowledge seeking process, on the one hand, and the end, together with the impact, of the same process, on the other.

Fourth

A person's worldview ought to be sound and comprehensive. It should comprise the spiritual realm as well. Otherwise, it will be incomplete and misleading.

Everything stemming from such a worldview (philosophy of existence) - such as society and civilization building processes - will be correspondingly inadequate and misleading.

As a result, people will be perennially torn between their intrinsic needs and that which is being served to them. Life will remain an anticlimactic and unfulfilled business.

It goes without saying that only with the revealed wisdom and guidance on-board can people reach their full potentials. Only then can life be lived to the fullest.

Matter (physics) can make sense only when in company with spirit (metaphysics), and this world when in company with the Hereafter.

Fifth

If the revelation is rejected, people will become vulnerable and an easy prey for Satan, who is willing to stop at nothing just to mislead and destroy man.

One of Satan's major methods pertains to the realm of metaphysics, the same realm he works tirelessly to alienate people from. Satan knows if people are kept away from and confused about it, he will be given more freedom to do what he was up to.

The spiritual world is as real and compelling as the physical one. When people are deceived concerning it, Satan becomes their only source of ontological “inspiration” and “direction”.

In order to “excel” in his duties and to make his promises as plausible as possible, Satan eavesdrops on the proceedings of the spiritual world. He then adds countless lies and distortions to what he had earwiggled, passing them as such to his servants and associates on the earth.

So important is this strategy to Satan that he yet risks being stoned by meteors.

Once people are misguided thus and afterwards continuously fed with untruths in relation to the spiritual and unseen world (*ghayb*), they have no choice but to keep resorting to superstitions, fantasies and outright lies when dealing with that world and its portents.

It is interesting to note that this sort of doubtful guessing at the unseen and the unknown (*ghayb*), and making mere conjectures about it, the Qur’an describes also using the word *rajm* (*rajman bi al-ghayb*) (al-Kahf, 22).

That means when a person does not know the unseen (*ghayb*), yet speaks about it, he speaks without knowledge. He only speculates, doing injustice to his self and his rationality.

He is like a person who aims - by pelting stones (*rajm*) - at an unknown and invisible target. He is unlikely to ever hit it, and even if he does, it will not be by design and he will never know it.

Certainly, no serious life initiative or system can ever be built upon such an epistemological foundation.

At any rate, this way things come full circle.

Satan initiated the whole process by incurring *rajm* (being stoned by meteors). Then, while trying to come to terms with those metaphysical dimensions of life which Satan deceived them about, people end up “pelting” ignorance, guesses and assumptions (another form of *rajm*) at those dimensions.

A non-believer’s life is an endless fluctuation between one type of *rajm*, associated with Satan as his superior, to another type, originating from himself as a consequence of the former.

Finally, today when seeing a shooting star, some people make a wish. They believe that doing so will make their wishes come true.

Others deem that they will reach their destiny, or that a major change in their lives will occur.

This only shows how far humanity has “progressed”. Perhaps more delusions and fallacies than ever before dominate people’s lives.

We live in a time that can be described either as a modern *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) or a *jahili* modernity.

